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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

A CUL-DE-SAC FOR REALISM

THIS is an intimate talk with my fellow realists. We believe that the future lies with us—that idealism is on the wane, and some form of realism destined to become the dominant philosophy. But which form?

Perhaps most of us, on this side of the Atlantic, can agree upon an ontologically monistic realism. Consciousness does not exist, in the sense James had in mind; there is no peculiar stuff, or realm, that is mental, as distinguished from the world of physical objects; there is no sign of anything in the existing universe but *qualia* in relation. There are, indeed, some among us who agree with the prevalent British belief in diaphanous, or undiaphanous, mental activity or awareness, in subjects or egos or souls, or some other non-physical entities. They will find no attack in this paper upon any such beliefs. But in order to avoid any misunderstanding, I wish to state as explicitly as possible that I personally side with the dominant tendency in American realism in denying the existence of a non-physical stuff or realm or awareness or subject or ego—"there ain't no sech animal." The "mental" is a subclass of the physical, or refers, if you prefer, to a relation between certain physical entities. This is ontological monism.

With that question the contention of this paper has nothing to do. But I am going to attack *epistemological* monism; and I wish to leave no excuse for any further confusion of my epistemological dualism with ontological dualism. In my papers published several years ago in this JOURNAL and in *Mind* I tried to make my position in this regard clear. But my epistemological dualism was none the less interpreted by several critics as if it must be a Cartesian dualism. I was even called an idealist, and classed among the "writers who are now so superbly stooping to take notice of realism."¹ It is important to speak of this, because other realists of greater note than I have been similarly misunderstood. For example, Lovejoy's keen arguments against Perry's epistemological monism² were treated

¹ E. B. Holt, in *The New Realism*, p. 307.

² This JOURNAL, Vol. IX., pp. 673 ff.

by Perry as if they were attacks upon realism. It sometimes seems as if some of our contemporary thinkers were unwilling to call anybody a realist who is not an epistemologically monistic, or "naïve" realist. But actually not a few of us who equally scorn to solve any problem by calling a troublesome entity "subjective" or "mental," who are pan-objectivistic realists, and—having taken our licks at idealism—have as good a right as any to the popular sobriquet new-realist, believe the pathway of epistemological monism to be a *cul-de-sac*. Realism, we protest, does not imply it; and it is precisely the contention of this paper that realism must abandon its wooing of this hopelessly acidulous vestal and return to the embraces of its old love, epistemological dualism.

For the sake of saving space, let me call these rivals for the hand of realism by their initials. E. M. has been, then, a veritable will-o'-the-wisp, an *ignis fatuus* which realism has been straining every nerve now for some years to grasp; but the result is "ever not quite." E. D., the jilted partner, has been showered with jeers, and deemed a grass widow for good. A few, more keenly alive to the situation, or less blindly obstinate in their pursuit of the new love, have attempted a sort of compromise. But this experiment in bigamy has met with attacks from both sides; and whatever aspect of that compromise-doctrine embraces E. M. will be subject to the criticisms that make against a chaster union. No flirting, even, with the lady!

The reasons why it seems to me, with many others, that E. M. must be rejected, in spite of her great superficial attractiveness, are not new. It may arouse a groan to restate them. But in spite of repeated and excellently clear statement, they seem never to have been fully grasped by some of the ablest of the naïve realists. And those who have attempted to meet these objections seem to us not to have satisfactorily succeeded.

Let us first note, however, just what the admitted actual situation is. *The character of our sense-qualities is a function of the nature of our sense-organs and brains, and of our position in space.* Consider an unchanging object in the space surrounding my body. As I change my position in space, all the sense-qualities which seem to me to reside out there in the object change. If my eyes were to be changed, however slightly (so as to be similar, for example, to the eyes of certain other men or animals), these sense-qualities would again be changed. If the nature of my brain were to be changed, or if the nerve from my eye were to reach, say, the auditory tract in my brain, my sense-qualities would be still different.

Now of these familiar and admitted facts four, and so far as I can see, only four interpretations can be given. The first is, that an infinite number of qualities exist permanently in the object, each

revealed by the proper perception-mechanism. The second is, that a new quality replaces the old in the object whenever any change in the position or nature of a perceiving organism is effected. On this second interpretation there will be *on occasion* a great many different varieties of the same generic quality existing simultaneously in the object—namely, when many different observers are perceiving it. Either of these alternatives may fairly be called E. M. The third possibility, which I espouse, is that the sense-qualities which exist in my experience when I look at an object are not, numerically, the very qualities that exist in the object, but are effects of those qualities produced in me, representative of the qualities which exist in the object.³ The fourth possibility is that my sense-qualities exist neither in me nor in the object which I am facing, but in some other place. Both the third and fourth views are E. D., making a numerical duplicity between our sense-qualities and the qualities residing in or constituting the object itself.

When I assert that only these four views are possible, I mean, *if we are to find a definite position in the time-space order for every existing quale*. But if we are ontologically monistic realists (and to those only am I now speaking), we must find such a position for every existing *quale*. We shall not be content to say that our sense-qualities are “subjective,” or “appearances,” or some such “mental” thing which need not have any location in space. That would be, anyway, but an easy way of shirking the problem by leaving it a mystery. Nor can we say that sense-qualities are subsisting entities that may exist in the mental order and not in the physical order. For we hold that all existing realities form *one* order—the physical world-order. And no entities more patently exist than our sense-qualities. They are *data datissima* indeed. They must, then, exist *somewhere* in the physical world-order, at least during the time when they exist within our experience. The question is, *where?* E. M. says: Out there in the objects. E. D. says, Somewhere else; the common form of it saying: In us.

It is impossible to get forward unless we can agree to take one horn or the other of this dilemma. I must, therefore, protest against Woodbridge's evasion of it. “A circle appears different to different observers differently situated. . . . Let us suppose that ten observers are given in different situations, then it is evident that the circle will appear ten times conformably to the ten situations. But over and above this evident fact *it is assumed that there will be ten different shapes which are existentially separate and distinct from one*

³ The phrase “in me” is vague and can only be satisfactorily interpreted by an explanation longer than is here possible. “In my brain” is perhaps the least objectionable equivalent, but it will inevitably provoke misunderstanding.

another, and of which each is existentially separate and distinct from the circle itself. That is, if the circle appears to one observer as a flat ellipse, then it is assumed that the *appearance* itself is a flat ellipse. What these shapes are in their essence, where to put them, what to do with them when they are put there, how explain their relations and connections with one another and with the circle—here are problems to tax all our ingenuity, and problems on which no experiment or no fact of experience can throw any light. To affirm that if a circle appears elliptical, then its elliptical appearance is an ellipse, is not to state a fact, it is to make an assumption which condenses whole volumes of speculative philosophy and psychology into a single sentence.”⁴

It is a matter of nomenclature whether we shall call the “elliptical appearance” “an ellipse” or something else. The *fact* in the case is this: there is a sense-quality within my experience, which has undeniable existence within my experience at least, and which is different in character from the sense-quality which I have when I change my position. *Where* does this undeniably existing *quale* exist? To say “the circle appears elliptical” is a shorthand way of talking of the case. Just what does that statement mean? It is an expression of our natural, but unanalyzed realism. There is a permanent object, a circle, of which these changing sense-qualities are appearances. As realists we agree to that. But accepting the existence of the permanent circle must not make us forget the evanescently existing sense-qualities which are “appearances” of it. An “appearance” must exist *somewhere*, it would seem. Certainly this sense-quality, which we are now calling an “appearance,” must exist somewhere—if we are giving up the category of “mental stuff” which does not need to exist in any *place*. Our assertion, then, is not that “the elliptical appearance is an ellipse”—which seems to be only a verbal substitution—but that the “elliptical appearance,” as Woodbridge terms the sense-quality in our experience, *is a datum*, a bit of reality, which must exist somewhere. I do not share his pessimism with regard to the questions where to put it, how explain its relations, *etc.*, although I can not here discuss these questions very much. The point to grasp now is, that the dilemma between E. M. and E. D. is a real one. This bit of reality exists either in the object outside the organism, *or* in the organism (or somewhere else).

The problem, so often explained by critics of E. M., is not one about the stuff things are made of, it is about the number, the order, the location of the bits of reality of which the existing universe is made up. Yet Woodbridge, in this and other essays,⁵ Dewey in vari-

⁴ This JOURNAL, Vol. X., p. 14. Italics in original.

⁵ E. g., “The Belief in Sensations,” this JOURNAL, Vol. X., p. 599.

ous essays,⁶ and most of the others who have undertaken to reply to these critics, persist in taking their arguments as if they were in behalf of idealism or ontological dualism, and so leave them still unanswered. For example, in a former article⁷ I cited the case of a number of mirrors imaging a single object. My contention was that (just as in the case of perception by various human organisms) the various images (sense-qualities in the case of the organisms) were qualitatively different from one another, as well as existent in different places, and, therefore, clearly, numerically different. If the situation is similar in the case of perceiving organisms, E. D. is proved true; different sense-qualities (qualitatively and numerically) are produced by the object in different organisms. But Holt, after quoting a passage from my article, makes the brief comment: "Thus it is proved to the satisfaction of idealists (*sic*) that two mirrors can not image the same object."⁸ Of course they can. The *question* is, Do the images exist *in the object*, are they numerically identical with some parts of it, or, are they numerically different, existing at other points in space, and only *similar* to it and representative of it?

If, then, the dilemma is accepted, I can proceed to state the three principal reasons why E. M. seems untenable, and some form of E. D., therefore, necessarily true.

I. *Contradictory qualities can not coexist at the same point in space at the same time.* If either variety of E. M. is true, they must so coexist, as we noted above. So if this italicized assertion is true, E. M. can not be true. A few venturesome thinkers have therefore denied the assertion. Space does not permit an extended discussion of their views. But discussion is hardly useful here, for the views in question are hardly more than assertions, without careful consideration of the difficulties in their way. McGilvary has sketched for us a world⁹ in which vast numbers of "immaterial" *qualia* exist at the same points as the "material" entities which form the executive order of the world. But why are these immaterial entities not discovered out there by science? Why does only one perceiver, possessed of one particular kind of sense-mechanism, perceive one of these innumerable *qualia*, another another, *etc.*? World stuff seems multiplied *præter necessitatem*. And such a view makes sharply against common sense, which views objects as having just one definite shape, size, color, *etc.* The world becomes blurred into an indistinguishable welter of qualities. All the illusory and hallucinatory qualities of objects are as truly "out there" as their "real" qualities!

⁶ *E. g.*, "Brief Studies in Realism," this JOURNAL, Vol. VIII., p. 393.

⁷ This JOURNAL, Vol. IX., p. 149.

⁸ *The New Realism*, p. 369.

⁹ *Philosophical Review*, Vol. XXI., p. 152.

Holt has been here, as generally, the most radical departer from common sense. He insists¹⁰ that the world is chock-full of contradictions: "every case of collision, interference, acceleration and retardation, youth and decay, equilibrium, *etc.*, *etc.*, is an instance."¹¹ But such opposition of forces or laws is not really a case of contradiction; these laws or forces are really but *tendencies*, which are not *actualized* simultaneously. This is a very different matter from the compressence at one point of contradictory qualities, which he seems to think becomes thereby plausible.

Unless, then, some happier argument can be adduced, most of us will agree with Montague's "axiom of uniplicity," and share his belief that the multifold-quality view (which is the inevitable corollary of a strict E. M.) "will ruin the realistic movement if it is not repudiated. Any one place at any one time must contain but one non-contradictory set of qualities. Such a set of qualities is what we mean by an object, and its occupancy of one space at one time is what we mean by its existence."¹²

II. *There is no apparent mechanism for the projection of sense-qualities into objects.* Whether or not it is *conceivable* that all the size-qualities, shape-qualities, color-qualities, *etc.*, that exist in the experience of the various observers when they simultaneously "perceive the same object" should really exist "out there" where the object is, there seems to be no way for them to *get* out there. These sense-qualities are admittedly functions of the organism; what they are to be must await for decision the nature of that organism. The mechanism of perception is, however, a one-way mechanism. It brings us influences from objects, but it includes no mechanism of reprojection of the qualities caused by it back into the objects. Perception is not an outreaching process, like a searchlight resting now on this object, now on that. It is simply a series of causes and effects: an event in the object produces a pulse of radiation, that produces an event in a sense-organ, that a nerve pulse, that a brain-motion. The sense-quality exists in our experience either exactly or nearly exactly at the instant of this brain-motion, upon whose nature *its nature* depends. By what mechanism should the sense-quality arise *in the object* at this precise instant? Is it not easier to suppose that perception is in reality no such boomerang; that in attributing our sense-qualities to the outer objects from which the influence comes we are victims of a universal illusion, and that the qualities we seem to see in the objects are really the impressions they make on us?

III. *Our sense-qualities exist at a time later than that of the*

¹⁰ *The New Realism*, pp. 360 ff., *The Concept of Consciousness*, Ch. XIII.

¹¹ *The New Realism*, p. 364.

¹² *Philosophical Review*, Vol. XXIII., p. 55.

events in the objects that cause them. This "time-difficulty" of naïve realism produces, as we all know, in certain cases the significant result that the object has utterly ceased to exist at the moment when the sense-quality exists in our experience, and in other cases the equally significant result that our sense-qualities exist in our experience in a time-order different from that of the events in the outer object. The impossibility that a sense-quality existing *now* in my experience should be numerically identical with any aspect of an object which no longer exists is so obvious that the argument needs no emphasis. Various naïve realists, however, have sought to evade the difficulty in some such manner as this: "Why, pray, would perception be any the less perception if we acknowledged that it is a relation to the past? Only because of the very assumption which is here in question, namely, that the *presence* of the object is equivalent to its temporal *presentness*. . . . If we tenaciously hold to the point that it is the *hearing*, not an objective-content-heard, which is *now*, the time-discrepancy vanishes."¹³

Such an analysis of the situation seems inadequate. It is not merely the act of perception which exists *now*; the sense-quality exists now. Only the implications of a theory "tenaciously held" can blind any one to that. It is the surest of all facts, the datum upon which all theories must build.

We may, indeed, agree that perception, like memory, is "a relation to the past." And when we think *about*, or *remember*, an object not now temporally present, we may, if we like, speak of the *presence* of that object to consciousness. But that really means, we insist, that our temporally present thought, or memory stuff, *refers to*, *represents*, a not actually present object. The case of perception is in this wise similar: there are temporally present in our experience—existing, undeniably, *now*—what we are calling sense-qualities. If these *qualia* are numerically identical with *qualia* existing in the *object*, or forming part of it, then it follows that these aspects of the object have not only "presence," but "presentness" in our experience. If, on the other hand, E. D. is true, the sense-qualities have "presentness," while the qualities of the *object* have "presence," in the sense that the object thought *of* or *remembered* has presence. It may be said to be *perceived*, just as the object in the other case may be *remembered*; but in both cases it is really *represented* by the *qualia* (sense-qualities or memory-stuff) now present. But at any rate, whether this view is correct or not, the time-difficulty remains a flat disproof of E. M. If as realists we believe in a time-space order where every *quale* that is ever to exist has a definite position, from which it never budes, it follows that a *quale* now temporarily

¹³ B. Ewer, this JOURNAL, Vol. VI., p. 147.

present in my field of consciousness can not be numerically identical with a *quale* which formed an aspect of an object that no longer exists.

As in the case of the other arguments against E. M., the point of this argument is constantly missed by contemporary writers. Holt, for example,¹⁴ quotes disdainfully the following excerpt from an earlier article of mine: "The 'real' object always exists earlier in time than the perceived object, which we hastily assume to be the 'real' object, yet which is really but an element in our own experience and not the object, or eject, which exists in and for itself."¹⁵ I had put the word "real" in quotation marks in order to remind the reader that the adjective was not of my choosing. The terms "real object" and "perceived object" were recommended by the committee of the American Philosophical Association to designate what I prefer to call the "object out there" and the "sense-quality," because, as I used to insist, the one is just as *real* as the other, and both belong, as I believe, to a single realistic world-order. The point of my sentence, then, as the context made clear, was exactly that which I have here been making—the numerical duplicity between the two *qualia* which E. M. identifies. But Holt's comment is as follows: "Succinctly stated, the astonishing argument is that the mental image is not a part of the real world, but is distinctly non-physical and non-real, and belongs intrinsically to another, the subjective order of being, because it lags in time behind the real order of things: and this is urged notwithstanding the fact that every case of image which can be cited from the strictly physical world lags in exactly the same way behind its real physical prototype."

This reply not only misses the point of the argument, but seems really to concede the case. It is admitted that every image lags behind its "prototype." Surely, then, the image is a different entity from the "prototype." Just so is the sense-quality a different entity from *its* prototype. If the assertion is made that both are but parts of *one object*, the reply is obvious that they are not the *same* part. Calling the whole process "one object" is only a verbal E. M. That part of the object which is the sense-quality exists at a later time, is numerically different from, and representative of, that part of the object which existed "out there"—the source of the radiation. But this is E. D.

There are other good arguments against E. M. But these are good enough. Surely the wedding of realism with this lady must not proceed until these objections are satisfactorily met. Many of us believe that they never can be satisfactorily met; that, in fact, E. M.

¹⁴ *The New Realism*, p. 307.

¹⁵ This JOURNAL, Vol. VIII., p. 371.

is a mistaken theory. If the objections to E. D. seem insuperable, the honest course would seem to be to commit ourselves to neither, but to keep our minds open for the present. The cocksureness, therefore, of the realists who hold to E. M. seems ill-advised. If they choose to exercise their will to believe in the face of such weighty arguments, they should at least be less impatient of those who espouse E. D.

It seems as if these realists had first decided that E. M. must be true, and then set to work as best they could to answer the objections to it. It is easy for them to do this, since E. M. is the natural human view—until one examines the situation carefully. But the natural view is by no means the correct view—as was shown, for example, when Copernicus upset man's natural way of thinking in another matter. E. D. requires just such a mental wrench; but it may none the less be the correct account. Hence it is not enough to start with the assumption that E. M. is true, and then, when the objections to it are offered, to declare that these aspects of the matter are a mystery, that they remain to be cleared up in the future. Until they are cleared up, E. M. can not pose as the correct view. We must indeed listen with open ears to any new defense offered in its behalf. We may even legitimately cherish the belief that it will turn out, after all, to be the correct view. But at present the suspicion seems well founded that this particular form of realism leads into a *cul-de-sac*; there is here no thoroughfare. My own belief is that the insistence on epistemological monism on the part of some of the most conspicuous leaders in the neo-realistic movement is the greatest obstacle in the way of the spread of a sound realistic philosophy.

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COMMENT ON PROFESSOR BROWN'S "MATTER AND ENERGY"

IN his paper on "Matter and Energy," recently published in this JOURNAL, Professor H. C. Brown has given an excellent example of sound metaphysical analysis in sharp contrast to what he calls "sentimental" philosophy. His conclusions are worth repeating:

"Our answer to the question raised above (p. 59) is now obvious. Atoms, electrons, and the like can not be unreal or they would not possess the value necessary to fulfil their function in a body of scientific knowledge. They are not mere symbols, nor are they independently existing elements brought together to constitute a whole of reality. They are simply phases of physical existence that have exceptional value from the fact that through centering attention on them it is possible to state some process in lawful fashion.